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Note verbale dated 13 May 2011 from the Permanent Mission of Benin to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of Benin to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Office of the President of the General Assembly and has the honour to transmit herewith the aide-memoire on the voluntary pledges and commitments undertaken by Benin in the context of its candidacy for the Human Rights Council (see annex).

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Annex to the note verbale dated 13 May 2011 from the Permanent Mission of Benin to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidacy of Benin for the Human Rights Council (2011-2014)

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

A. General review

1. The Republic of Benin is a country of around 9 million inhabitants, united in diversity, who occupy a territory of 116,600 square kilometres on the Gulf of Guinea, bordered by the Niger, Togo, Nigeria and the Atlantic Ocean.

2. Benin's commitment to democracy and the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms dates to the beginning of the 1990s. Following the National Conference of Vital Elements of the Nation (Conférence des forces vives de la Nation) in February 1990, Benin undertook a peaceful and democratic transition from a totalitarian to a pluralist political system. Since this peaceful transition to democracy, Benin has come to be viewed as a pioneer of democracy in Africa.

3. The Constitution of 11 December 1990 laid a foundation for the Republic of Benin centred on democracy and full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Under this Constitution, the separation of powers is rigorously applied, and every political action is geared towards the individual. Every individual, every citizen, has the right to refer violations of human rights to the Constitutional Court.

4. Benin has signed and ratified most of the international human rights instruments. The Government is working to create the conditions for their effective enjoyment by all citizens, and regularly informs treaty bodies of the administrative, legislative and other measures it has undertaken in that regard.

5. Aware of the interdependence of all human rights, the Government of Benin stresses the need to create the conditions for the enjoyment of socio-economic and cultural rights as the means of ensuring the sustainability of acquired political rights.

6. Benin included gender equality in its Constitution, in accordance with the provisions of international and regional human rights instruments.

7. Moreover, the Government is working to implement the Document on the National Policy on Women, adopted on 31 January 2001. That document is aimed, inter alia, at improving conditions for women in society and before the law, and at securing their education and training. A Code of Persons and the Family has been adopted in that regard, eliminating polygamy and introducing such other measures as the elimination of all forms of violence against women. The Government of Benin has created a National Institute for the Promotion of Women, whose missions include:

- Initiating and pursuing study and research on women and their impact on development.

- Collecting, updating and distributing data on the condition of women in Benin.
- Compiling and producing statistics in the area of gender.
- Proposing policies and strategies for improving the living conditions of women.
- Working to reduce inequalities between men and women.
- Ensuring the strengthening of the capacities of girls and women through theoretical, technical and practical training.

8. The Government has made available, to the competent national and civil-society structures, adequate means as well as the facilities needed effectively to combat child labour, maltreatment or trafficking. For this purpose, Benin supports and strengthens its Brigade for the Protection of Minors, which operates on a 24-hour basis daily.

9. International instruments relative to the rights of children, as well as the recommendations of treaty bodies, are implemented by the National Commission on the Rights of the Child. The 2006 law on the conveyance of minors and suppressing the traffic in children strengthens these provisions at the national level. Civil society organizations such as the Association of Women Lawyers of Benin (AFJB), Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), the African Non-Governmental Organizations and Associations Network for the Integration of Women (RIFONGA), Care Afrique, and Social Watch, are working with the public authorities scrupulously to implement the provisions of these texts.

10. A number of structures, like the National Agency for Employment, have been created to complement the Government's efforts at job creation in order to combat youth unemployment.

B. Pledges and commitments

At the national level

11. The Government of Benin will work to ensure that democracy and the full respect for universally recognized human rights take root. It commits itself to intensify its efforts in the following areas:

- Prohibiting torture, by strengthening existing legal frameworks, ensuring that detention facilities conform to international norms, and implementing a national torture-prevention mechanism.
- Respecting the right to life, by completing the procedure for ratifying the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Aiming at the Abolition of the Death Penalty.
- Protecting the rights of children, by adopting measures to combat the phenomenon of "child sorcerers".

12. As the Government of Benin works to consolidate fundamental freedoms, it will also work to improve the living conditions of its citizens by ensuring their access to basic rights, i.e. to shelter, medical care, food, clothing and education.

13. The Government will accelerate the implementation of economic and social measures in the area of gender equality, in particular those concerning microcredit

for the poorest, free caesarean section medical procedures, and measures to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other related infectious diseases.

14. The Government will guarantee the full participation of women in the decision-making process for all national political positions.

15. The Government will pursue and strengthen the mainstreaming of the public campaign to combat violence against women.

16. It will also pursue and strengthen the implementation of measures to promote cost-free access to primary education, which is now compulsory.

17. The Government of Benin will continue to attach the highest importance to the family as the central unit of Beninese society, in accordance with the Code of Persons and the Family.

At the international level

18. The Government of Benin considers human rights to be the third pillar of the United Nations system, and consequently accords them the full significance they deserve. In this regard, Benin commits itself to working with the mechanisms of the Human Rights Council, especially its special procedures, and to participate in all the work of the Council.

19. The Government of Benin supports the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights, in accordance with paragraph 5 of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

20. The Government of Benin will actively participate in international cooperation as the most effective means of promoting and protecting all universally recognized human rights.

21. In collaboration with the other members of the Human Rights Council, the Government of Benin will devote the entirety of its term to the promotion and protection of all universally recognized human rights, in a spirit of cooperation.

22. Education on and learning about human rights remain essential means for the dissemination and understanding of human rights, and particularly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Government of Benin will work to follow up on the implementation of the resolutions of the General Assembly concerning the International Year of Human Rights Learning as well as those concerning the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education.

23. The Government of Benin will continue to stress the necessity of implementing, for the countries that desire it, a flexible and unconditional system of technical assistance in the area of promoting and protecting human rights. It will participate effectively in the international cooperative process and in meetings to consider and exchange ideas on best practices in the area of promoting human rights.

24. Benin will take all legal measures to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and all other international and regional instruments, as well as to contribute to the promotion and protection of all human rights, including the right to development.